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ABSTRACT

The illustrated manual contains instructions for teaching blind and partially sighted students to ski. It is noted that blind students should be coached, instructed, and encouraged in the same manner as sighted students although additional safety precautions should be employed. Psychological implications for the blind student learning to ski are given to include building confidence through mastery of graduated experiences and imagining various positions and terrains. Instructors are advised to allow students to feel all parts of the ski while learning nomenclature, to converse with students prior to instruction, to begin slowly and never forget safety, to stay close to the student, and to provide a marker for the student to wear to caution other skiers. It is suggested that instructors lead the partially sighted and follow the blind, alert students when to unload from a Poma lift, take certain positions to aid students in riding the chair lift, and ski backwards holding student's ski tips for teaching wedged turns. Suggested for training instructors to teach the blind is blocking vision of one instructor, who then follows directions of another instructor. (MC)

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YA "SEE" WHAT WE MEAN

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TEACHING THE BLIND TO SKI

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Preface

The blind student should be coached, instructed and encouraged in the same manner as the sighted student. Additional methods must be employed to ensure the student's safety, but most usual instructional sequences can be followed. The blind student should be challenged to experience the sensations of speed and maneuvering which can be controlled at will. To offer the blind students "quiet games" is to cheat them out of adventures and experiences that are justly theirs. To offer less than vigorous activity is not good enough.

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Introduction

The purpose of this manual is to serve as a guide for instructors of blind students and/or those who may wish to encourage the blind to ski. We have made a beginning effort to provide only the basic essential information which we think is universal.

The suggested teaching methodology is not offered as "the ultimate document," rather as an interim reference with the hope that others may be encouraged to research, record and share.

It is hoped that NISA will be able to extend its research of instruction for blind students in an effort to provide guidance for others who may wish to serve.

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Psychological Implications

The psychological implications for the blind student learning to ski are basically the same as for the sighted person.

- *Fear must be gradually diminished and eventually erased.*
- *Understandable language must be used by the instructor.*
- *Immediate trust and confidence in both student and instructor must be developed.*
- *The blind student must be treated as an equal. Remember that he "sees" some things that the instructor does not.*
- *Build confidence through successful mastery of graduated experiences.*
- *Encourage the student to "visualize" or actively* **imagine** *various skills, positions, movements and terrain.*
- *Use positive reinforcement (praise) for* **actual** *step by step progress; do not give false praise.*

The instructor must share what he sees when the student is stopped. Share anything of general interest with your students. Describe a humorous event or anything happening at the moment. Normal conversation is desirable, but you must share things you see with your students.

Plan every turn and traverse. **Keep your students out of trouble. Learn to anticipate** your student's direction early enough for safe descent. Become hawkish in watching ahead of his skis -- give preparatory commands for bumps, moguls, ups, downs, rough snow conditions, ice, slabs. Learn to lead the students with few commands that are clearly understandable. Use positive and uncomplicated commands. Find something good to relay about what the student did before making corrections.

Let Them Do It!

Begin by having the students feel all parts of the ski as you give the nomenclature and the purpose of each. They will understand how the binding operates if given a little time to hand operate the part. For example, with several tries, the students will be able to put on their own skis. The instructor must check to be certain that boots are properly aligned and safety straps are buckled.

Suggested Communications

Spend some time "just talking" with the student prior to instruction, even if it's only a few minutes. Get to know each other. You will get to know each other's voice inflections, volume, and so on.

Learn single word directions which are clearly understood by the student. Words can be easily garbled and must be spoken clearly. Brief commands must be used -- up, down, turn, traverse, check.

Getting Started

The blind student should be exposed to the same sequence of instruction as a sighted person. A few assists along the way will help the students develop much needed confidence in themselves and trust in their instructor. The first few descents should be accomplished no faster than two or three miles per hour. For the first few runs, the instructor should hold the student's hand, skiing alongside to provide stability and security. Remember, **slow and easy does it. Have unlimited** patience. Blind students usually have not experienced self-controlled speed. Once the student begins to relax and "trust his skiing-self" he will usually become more aggressive. Care should be taken to hold down the speed.

Never forget safety is the number one objective.

Moving Around Together

Most of the time, the student will be able to follow the instructor by the sound of the skis or voice. There will be occasions when additional communication becomes necessary. In crowded areas and lift lines, instructors and students will find using the horizontal ski pole helpful as a guide. Use extended grasp whenever possible. See figure A.

A

In congested areas requiring crisp movement, use a closed grasp which provides the student with more direct guidance. See figure B.

It is imperative that the blind skier wear something which will alert others that caution is necessary. A panel similar in size and shape to a racing panel is most helpful. The panel should have a background of brilliant orange or yellow with the word "BLIND" stencilled in five inch letters on both the front and back.

B

Positioning Yourself With The Partially Sighted Student

Partially sighted students prefer the instructor to "go first." The partial image of the lead skier is of a great assistance directionally for the partially sighted skier. The instructor must be careful to maintain his voice volume particularly on windy days.

Some blind students prefer the instructor to follow rather than lead. They feel the continual up-valley breeze deflects commands which are better understood from behind.

Poma Lifts

The blind student will have little difficulty learning to ride the Poma Lift because the skier is towed, forming a natural pendulum. The instructor must be alert to tell the student **when to unload.**

Riding The Chair Lift

Always position yourself on the inside to properly place your student. Place the student's hand -- palm open -- toward the approaching chair. This will allow the student to feel the location of the chair and thereby enhance proper loading.

For unloading, place your arm **over** the student's arm and grasp his hand. In this position, the instructor is in the best position to pull, push and otherwise maneuver the student if necessary.

Assisting The First Few Turns

Position yourself to assist the student with his first wedged turn. It is important that the instructor develop early confidence in the blind skier's ability to make a wedged turn. The instructor should ski backwards in an open reversed wedge holding the student's ski tips to ensure the proper turn. After 20 or 30 turns in this manner, the student can feel composure in the turn. This is most effective, since it provides proper control of speed which is an important safety concern at this phase.

Training Instructors

Ski instructors can readily learn to ski as the blind do ski. One proven method is to place the instructors in exactly the same situation as the blind student by "blocking" the instructor's vision with other race goggles filled with plaster of paris or simply by putting tape over the eyes. Have instructors pair off and with verbal and

one without and teach each other. They rapidly learn the need for clearer explanations, voice control, and physically guiding the student. Many sighted instructors relate that this experience has greatly enhanced their sensitivity in teaching sighted students.